

Foreign affair is a massive part of the United States government in both the modern day and the history of this country. The importance of foreign affairs means that major events in American history, like the Iranian hostage crisis, are important to know and understand. The relationship between the United States and Iran was very strong after the 1953 coup and deteriorated after 1979 because of the hostage crisis. The coup of 1953 reinstated the shah and removed Mossadegh, the Iranian prime minister at that time, from power. The CIA staged this coup to reinstate the shah, and this began relationships between the United States and Iran. The shah and the United States were very close in their relations-America provided the shah with any weapons he wanted, and supported him in Iran. Iran offered the United States an exceptionally good oil deal and protection in the Middle East from other countries. This mutual beneficiary system turned sour during the years leading up to the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. The hostage crisis began on November 4th, 1979. Iranian students stormed the embassy and took the people inside hostage. The crisis lasted 444 and ended any relations between the United States and Iran. The United States involvement in Iran can be used to argue a cause of the hostage crisis of 1979. The United States got involved in Iran's affairs after the 1953 coup and this caused the hostage crisis because of the resentment following the reinstallation of the shah in Iran, the association of America supporting the shah, the riots in 1963, and the revolution of 1978 when Iranians believed the United States would stage another coup to reinstate the shah.

During the early 1950s Mohammad Mossadegh rose to power in Iran and eventually gained enough power to overthrow the shah. Mossadegh presided over the establishment of the National Front, which was composed of divergent forces that had similar goals. Mossadegh also forced oil nationalism in parliament, and this act provoked a boycott from European powers that relied on Iranian oil. Even though the boycott hurt Iran's economy, his uncompromising

campaign against foreign powers was very popular among the Iranian people. In 1951 the shah was faced with a nationalist revolt against foreign intervention, so he appointed Mossadegh as prime minister because he knew the people loved Mossadegh's ideas.<sup>1</sup> Mossadegh became more and more powerful, even redirecting the shah's power for himself. When he was dismissed in July of 1952 by the shah, Mossadegh demanded that he get control of the armed forces.<sup>2</sup> After Mossadegh was dismissed from the government, there were massive riots in objection across Iran that resulted in him being reinstated. When Mossadegh was reinstated, it took him a couple of months until he felt secure, but once he did, he dismissed the Majles. Mossadegh never gained the full support of the army to be able to undermine the shah's power, the clergy, and significant parts of the commercial and financial community left him. He did gain some support as the Communist Tudeh Party that originally opposed him began to support Mossadegh. Mossadegh's rise to power led to him overthrowing the shah and was helped greatly by his popular oil policies.

Mossadegh introduced an oil policy to Iran that eventually became critical to Iran's interaction with western powers and shaped Iran's economy. His oil policy emphasized how important oil was to Iran's national independence, and this won him a lot of support from people within Iran. Many western nations were using Iran for their oil, so Iranians were eager to remove this western influence from their lives. On April 1951 the Iranian Parliament voted to nationalize concessions and installations of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.<sup>3</sup> This act proved to hurt Iran's economy because, "In 1950, 31,217,000 metric tons of oil were exported, but this fell to

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<sup>1</sup> "Iranian Revolution." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Ed. William A. Darity, Jr. 2nd ed. Vol. 4. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. 143-145. *U.S. History in Context*. Web. 6 Nov. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Sick, Gary, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, New York: Random House, 1985, Print, 6

<sup>3</sup> Sick, 6

9,158,000 metric tons in 1951 and to a pitiful 14,000 metric tons in 1952 when the British left.”<sup>4</sup>

Iran depended on foreign powers to export oil for their economy, so as the nation became more nationalistic, it lost revenue. For Iran’s economy to survive, the nation had to rely on foreign powers. This went against what the Iranian people and Mossadegh wanted for Iran. Despite nationalism being popular in Iran, the nation was heavily dependent on western powers. Mossadegh’s oil policies brought him in direct conflict with the western nations, though Iran kept this oil policy with the shah because it was so popular with the Iranian public. Oil had a heavy impact on Iran’s economy and interactions with foreign powers which eventually led to the coup.

The 1953 coup, the beginning of the United States’ involvement in Iran, removed Mossadegh from power and reinstated the shah. Mossadegh was in control of Iran at this point, and there was an international boycott of Iranian oil by the Western powers. This boycott severely hurt the Iranian economy and their exports plummeted from \$400 million in 1950 to less than two million dollars.<sup>5</sup> To remove Mossadegh from power and put the shah back in power, the CIA staged a coup led by General Fazlollah Zahedi. The 1953 coup started the United States’ involvement in Iran. Previously America had exploited Iran for their oil, but not nearly as much as other western powers. The American government cut off all aid to Iran because they did not like Mossadegh as a leader. Mossadegh’s oil policies cut off the western nations from their main sources of oil. Mossadegh wanted to remove Iran from western influence, an act that angered the United States and other western nations. The coup prevented the United States from

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<sup>4</sup> Grafeld, Margaret P. Washington D.C.: US Department of State EO Systematic Review, 5 July 2006, PDF, 5.

<sup>5</sup> "Mohammad Mossadegh, Prime Minister of Iran, 1951 -- 1953." *The Cold War--1945-1991*. Gale, 1992. *U.S. History in Context*. Web. 6 Nov. 2014.

claiming in the future that their involvement in Iranian affairs was to improve their knowledge of the area. After the coup succeeded and Mossadegh left Iran on August 15, 1953, the CIA and MI6 organized street demonstrations in support of the shah.<sup>6</sup> They needed the support of the people to be able to keep the shah in power after the coup. The United States justified their actions to Americans as they described the coup as an attempt to avoid a communist take over, despite Mossadegh's record of anti-communism. In his first year in office Mossadegh had acted out against communism by outlawing the Communist Tudeh Party. The 1953 coup removed Mossadegh from power and began international relationships between the United States and Iran.

The true facts of 1953 coup began to be forgotten and twisted, so the Iranian view of the shah and the coup was altered. A vivid political reality in Iran after the coup was that the shah was a pliant creature of the United States. The people of Iran were forgetting how they wanted the shah back and just remembered his actions as a leader. The shah was considered a harsh tyrant that was disliked by the majority of Iranian people. The shah was reinstated by a foreign government during the coup so the people could use this as a rallying point and argue that the shah's leadership was forced upon them. This idea also resulted in America being blamed for his actions. The coup was a defining experience for Iranians that were raised in the shadow of 1953 and it was used as a national rallying point when attacking the shah. A central myth of the coup is that the United States staged it single-handedly without any Iranian support and imposed a harsh tyrant on reluctant people who wanted Mossadegh to continue ruling Iran.<sup>7</sup> The shah referred back to the 1953 coup as "the national uprising" and designated the date of the coup as

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<sup>6</sup> Gale, "Mohammad Mossadegh, Prime Minister of Iran, 1951 -- 1953."

<sup>7</sup> Houghton, David Patrick, *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001, Print, 58

the start of Iranian economic growth as he expected it to epitomize his reign.<sup>8</sup> The shah believed that since the people welcomed him back in 1953 that he could continue to use the coup to defend his reign, no matter his actions. The United States was forced to become involved in Iranian affairs to protect American security because of their involvement in that area of the world. It was believed that if the shah was overthrown then there would be massive damage to American national security, especially if his successor was pro-Soviet. The 1953 coup was remembered in different ways, which were highly connected the opinions of the Iranian people about the shah.

The Iranian people despised the shah because after the coup, especially in the 1960s and 70s, the secret police and western reforms were opposed by the common people of Iran. The shah's rule over Iran was considered to be authoritarian because of what he imposed on the people. His divisive economic policies and ties to the United States were despised by the Iranian people since the shah was forcing Iran to become more westernized and dependent on the United States because the shah relied on the technology and assistance from the United States to turn his visions into a reality. The shah established SAVAK, a secret police force that was responsible for internal security and foreign intelligence, with the help of the CIA in 1957 to monitor the opposition to the palace. SAVAK was known for its brutality as they used torture and political persecution against enemies of the shah. This secret police force had the ability to identify and intimidate the shah's political enemies. SAVAK represented the worst of the monarchy because they were everywhere and destroyed anything the shah wanted. The shah used SAVAK to spy on different political meetings with photographic surveillance and Iranian citizens that opposed the

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<sup>8</sup> Sick, 8.

oppressive government were assassinated by hit squads.<sup>9</sup> SAVAK caused the people's hatred for the shah to grow, and since SAVAK was also tied to the CIA and America, this gave the Iranian people more reason to hate the United States and their involvement of Iranian affairs. Also, as SAVAK was partially created by the CIA, it gave the people reason to believe that their government was controlled by the Americans and that the shah was a puppet of the American government. The shah also forced unwanted reforms on the Iranian people. The shah staged the White Revolution, starting in January 1963, which led Iran on a western-style economic modernization program. This program involved land reform, women's suffrage, forest conservation, rural literacy, denationalization of state-owned industries, and profit sharing for industrial workers, all of which were very new and unwanted among the Iranian people because the common people wanted to keep their traditions and avoid westernization.<sup>10</sup> The White Revolution went against classic Iranian ideals, and since these ideals were western, they caused the people to reject western societies even more. The shah used the United States to turn his westernized military and economic visions in to reality and the United States in return made use of their relationship with Iran.

America and the shah had a very close political and economic relationship that benefited both sides of the duo. Under the shah America and Iran were closely allied because both countries had things to offer each other. Iranians believed that all American presidents were the same and that all of these presidents supported the shah because of this close alliance. Since the Iranian people hated the shah, this belief mangled the public's view of American presidents who had all appeared to be pulling the shah's strings. In their alliance, the United States guaranteed

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<sup>9</sup> "Shah of Iran Admits to Police Operations in US." *JSTOR*. Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), n.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2015, 23

<sup>10</sup> "Mohammad Reza Pahlevi." *The Cold War--1945-1991*. Gale, 1992. *U.S. History in Context*. Web. 6 Nov. 2014.

the shah access to some of the more advanced non-nuclear technology in their military arsenal on the agreement that the shah protected western interests in the Persian Gulf region.<sup>11</sup> As the shah obtained more and more weaponry from the United States, he was advised to improve the manpower behind the weaponry, as the shah was not lacking military equipment but the manpower to properly make use of this equipment to the extent that the shah wanted. After this suggestion the shah began to request technical advice and assistance from the American government. The United States government sent Richard Hallock, a highly regarded analyst of military procurement and management, to Iran to directly advise the shah.<sup>12</sup> The shah had ambitious military and economic visions for Iran, and he relied on American technology and assistance for them to successfully happen. Since the United States was beginning to control the military of Iran, they were forced to become more and more involved in the government and all Iranian affairs. This involvement angered Iranian people because they did not approve of the government in the first place. It was a mistake for the United States to get so involved in the Iranian government because it cause the Iranian people to hate both the shah and the United States. The United States also relied on the shah and much as he relied on them because the shah protected American interests in a region that was growing in importance to the Western industrial system by protecting their oil interests. The United States wanted this relationship as they said: "...we believe the preferred course of action is to enter into a close relationship with Iran which would have us as its principal supplier for fuel and plant."<sup>13</sup> The American government created this powerful mutual dependency as they knew the benefits that each country would be provided with.

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<sup>11</sup> Sick, 18

<sup>12</sup> Sick, 16

<sup>13</sup>Grafeld, 2

The United States openly supported the shah and his government and also made a massive impact in Iran's economy. When he was promoting the unwanted reforms, like the White Revolution, America showed full support to keep the shah happy. Also, the United States had to make sure that the shah knew that he had their unwavering support. This unwavering support to the shah caused some unpopularity towards the American government as the shah was not a popular figure in Iran. Iran's economy relied on foreign exports, and the United States was a major part of the oil industry in Iran. The shah relied on oil in Iran, as in the 1970s oil consisted of more than 75% of government revenues.<sup>14</sup> The country could not cope with this expansion, and the shah relied on oil to obtain everything that he wanted. Since the Iranian economy was now another part of Iran dependent on the American government, a fact that the people hated. This hatred led to the common people of Iran protesting their government.

The Riots of 1963 protested the shah and his rule over the Iranian people and showed an interest in a new Iranian Republic. The Riots of 1963 were led by Khomeini, a man that had very strong anti-western feelings, and denounced the corruption, constitutional violations and the "Westoxication", indiscriminate imitation of all things western, of the shah's regime.<sup>15</sup> He led the Riots of 1963 because he was able to encourage the Iranian people to support him instead of the shah. These riots protested the reforms placed on the country and the shah's policies. After Khomeini was arrested, pro-Khomeini protesters gathered in bazaars, which provoked the government troops to shoot. Riots spread through the country to protest the shah and in reaction to the troops shooting people.<sup>16</sup> During these riots the public formed multiple urban guerrilla organizations, which consisted of disaffected young intellectuals. These guerrilla organizations

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<sup>14</sup> Gale, "Mohammad Reza Pahlevi." *The Cold War--1945-1991*.

<sup>15</sup> Sick, 10

<sup>16</sup> Gale, "Mohammad Reza Pahlevi." *The Cold War--1945-1991*.

conducted hit-and-run operations on police stations, border posts, and other institutional targets. There were also sporadic assassinations, including seven Americans, showing how the Iranian public was against American intervention in their country.<sup>17</sup> In response SAVAK conducted unlimited warfare against these organizations by extreme acts of violence and using anything at their disposal. The Riots of 1963 protested the shah and the western influences from the government.

Anti-western feelings in Iran helped to promote the Riots of 1963 because the Iranian people did not want people in the government to be associated with the United States and did not approve of certain privileges given to the United States. The Iranian people who supported Khomeini were especially against people in the government being associated with the United States. In the 1960s there was a cabinet minister named Ali Amini who was tagged as Washington's man because he supported the United States in carrying out a badly needed reform program. The people of Iran forced the shah to dismiss Amini because of their immediate dislike of his support from the American government.<sup>18</sup> Iranians also disapproved of the special privileges that were given to the United States. The United States military personnel were exempt from the jurisdiction of Iranian national courts, which granted the military personnel the same immunity that diplomats enjoyed. This was highly reminiscent of Iran's colonial past, which was very unpopular because it gave extraterritorial privileges. The 1963 Riots were fighting against these extraterritorial privileges that western nations, especially the United States, were enjoying, and this fight continued in 1978 when the country was strong enough to fight again.

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<sup>17</sup> Sick, 23

<sup>18</sup> Sick, 9-10

The Revolution of 1978 helped to remove the shah from the government and was proof of the many anti-western feelings that existed in Iran that were growing in strength. The Revolution of 1978, just like the Riots of 1963, was led by Khomeini and the momentum for the Revolution was built by Khomeini while he was still in exile. After Khomeini overthrew the shah in the late 1970s the only logical explanation for the Iranian people was that the United States had supported Khomeini. This idea existed because the United States and Iran were so closely connected and the United States had such a major influence in Iranian affairs. The Revolution of 1978 was a violent affair, and every common Iranian man was considered a martyr. These martyrs led to very crowded funerals, and there were even protests at the martyr's funerals.<sup>19</sup> SAVAK, one of the most hated parts of the shah's Iranian government, was a target of retribution during the revolution. SAVAK men were even beaten up and killed by the revolutionists. The revolutionists dragged SAVAK officer General Latifi out of his car, which they set on fire, to beat and drag him through the crowd, most likely to death.<sup>20</sup> The brutality shown by the revolutionists is seen as revenge for the injustices that the revolutionists believe the shah and Iranian government had forced upon them for many years. A staple of the revolution, because of the two countries closeness, was anti-Americanism. The Islamic and nationalist forces hated how close the last four American presidents had been with the shah and there were very high levels of mistrust and anger towards anything American. During the revolution these feelings were shown when banks, cinemas, and symbols of the west were torched.<sup>21</sup> There was also a popular chant at protests, "death to America," and Iranians believed America was accountable for the shah's crimes when they said: "Why did the Americans do this? Why did

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<sup>19</sup> Burnett, David, Robert Pledge, and Jacques Menasche. *44 Days: Iran and the Remaking of the World*, Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2009, Print, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Burnett, 165

<sup>21</sup> Burnett, 60

they do that?”<sup>22</sup> The government that the people were rebelling against was denounced as anti-Islamic. During the Tehran University Demonstration on January 13, 1979, the people chanted: “This is your last moment, American shah.”<sup>23</sup> The people were furious with the shah and his actions, and many Iranians wanted the shah out of the government and maybe even dead. During the Tehran University Demonstration soldiers joined and were welcomed by the protestors.<sup>24</sup> The soldiers, a major part of the shah’s defense in the revolution, wanted rid of the shah and American influences in Iran. During the revolution the people of Iran conducted what was known as the “40-40”. The 40-40 were strikes that were conducted throughout the country. These were clashes between the security forces and the people, and the deaths were commemorated on the fortieth day. After the fortieth day there would be a new round of strikes. The 40-40 was a statement against the government that eventually resulted in the shah’s departure. Very close to the events of the Iranian hostage crisis were protests that went down the streets of Iran. These protests were on December 16, 1978, and the Iranian people were protesting the shah and the United States down the streets of Iran. All traffic was stopped and the protest was down the main street of Iran.<sup>25</sup> The Revolution of 1978 exemplified the anti-shah and American feelings from the Iranian people, and these feelings led to fear after the shah left Iran for the United States.

After the shah left Iran because of the 1978 Revolution, he went to the United States for cancer treatment and the popular belief in Iran was that another coup, similar to the 1953 coup, would be staged by the United States to reinstate the shah. The shah was forced to leave Iran on

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<sup>22</sup> Burnett, 117

<sup>23</sup> Burnett, 82

<sup>24</sup> Burnett, 92

<sup>25</sup> Burnett, 24-25

January 1, 1979 because of the 1978 Revolution.<sup>26</sup> When the shah left Iran, the people were ecstatic. All symbols of the ancient regime were torn down and destroyed. After spending short periods of time in other countries, the shah eventually went to the United States and when the people of Iran heard about this they believed that it was a plot for another coup. Iranians remembered the 1953 coup vividly, and these views affected how the people viewed the shah leaving for Iran. It was difficult for Iranians to believe that the shah was actually sick, and some people did not even believe it after he had died. A common thought was:

Because they believed as an article of faith that if the shah came to the United States it would usher in a series of events similar to those that had happened in 1953...assisted the pro-Shah demonstrators in overthrowing Mohammed Mossadegh and putting the Shah back on the Peacock throne. They believed that as an article of faith. Whether it was true or not is irrelevant.<sup>27</sup>

Even if the United States had no intention of staging a coup the Iranian people both feared and believed that it would happen. The shah also expected the United States to stage another coup to return him to the throne, just like in 1953, and even went as far to blame the United States for his departure from Iran.<sup>28</sup> There were many ideas and themes in the revolution, but the vital one that led to animosity towards the United States was: “The one constant theme that obsessed the movement against the shah, both the leader of the revolution and the followers, was a fear that the United States would repeat 1953 in destroying Iran’s revolution.”<sup>29</sup> This fear and theme would lead the revolutionists to act to prevent a potential coup. The revolutionists were desperate to oust the shah and remove American influence from Iran, and another common thought that led to increased fear of America was: “We felt that by allowing the shah into America they were

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<sup>26</sup> Burnett, 57

<sup>27</sup> a + d in Houghton, 46

<sup>28</sup> Houghton, 67

<sup>29</sup> Houghton, 59

conspiring against the revolution.”<sup>30</sup> The Iranian public was afraid of American influence in Iran and the potential for another coup. These fears would lead the Iranians to violence and protests against America, Americans in Iran, and eventually the Iranian hostage crisis.

After the reinstatement of the shah in Iran in 1953 the Iranian people were angered because of America’s support for the shah and the shah’s authoritarian rule in Iran. This led to the Riots of 1963 and the Revolution of 1978. During the Revolution of 1978 the Iranian people believed that the United States would stage another coup and this led to the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. The shah’s secret police and western reforms that destroyed traditional Iranian values were widely unpopular among the Iranian people and caused the shah to be hated by the people. The relationship that America and the shah had was very close politically and economically, and both sides benefited from this relationship. The Riots of 1963 were the beginnings of the Iranian people outwardly protesting against the shah and his rule, and the Iranian people began to show their interest in a new Iranian Republic. These riots were promoted in Iran by anti-western feelings since the people did not want the government to be associated with the United States and did not approve of the privileges the United States obtained. The removal of the shah in the Revolution of 1978 was evidence that the anti-western feelings were gaining strength. When the shah finally left Iran, and went to the United States for cancer treatment, the popular belief in Iran was that the United States would stage another coup to reinstate the shah. After the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis Iran and the United States cut off all foreign relations with each other. The United States had given Iran many weapons and advice in military affairs, which explains why America now attempts to limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and control a lot of Middle Eastern affairs.

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<sup>30</sup> Houghton, 60-61  
Word count: 4,082